

2014-15 SQUIRREL HUNTING COOPERATOR SURVEY REPORT



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Prepared by:
Ben Robinson
Wildlife Biologist



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Thank you to all the hunter cooperators who sent in hunting logs for the Fall Squirrel Hunting Cooperator Survey. Your efforts are appreciated, and we encourage you to continue sending in your hunting logs. Encourage your hunting buddies to do the same! Survey participation has been decreasing over the past few years so be sure to recruit your friends. The following report will cover the results of last season's (2014-15) Fall Squirrel Hunting Cooperator Survey and the 2014 Mast Survey. Last season's harvest and hunting effort totals are included as well as the current population trends, along with an outlook for the upcoming season.

I. 2014-15 Fall Squirrel Hunter Cooperator Survey

The squirrel survey was developed in 1995 as a voluntary initiative. Hunters are asked to record data including date of hunt, county hunted, hours hunted, number of hunters, number of dogs, and number of fox & gray squirrels (seen, killed, and wounded), on a diary-type hunting log. Logs are available on the internet: <http://fw.ky.gov/Hunt/Pages/Game-Species.aspx> or by calling **1-800-858-1549**. Hunters simply keep the log up-to-date as the hunting season progresses, and mail it to Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife (KDFWR) Headquarters when they're finished hunting for the season. Data collected from the survey gives the KDFWR information that can be used to monitor squirrel population trends in Kentucky and better serve the hunters of the state. Each year participating hunter cooperators are mailed a new hunting log, the results of the survey, and a small gift. Hunters who wish to receive a copy of their log from the previous year may call 800-858-1549 ext. 4545 or e-mail ben.robinson@ky.gov.

Summary of Last Year's Hunter Logs

Participation has been decreasing over the last several years. Once again, don't forget to mail in your log and encourage other squirrel hunters to do the same. Why not take someone new hunting this year? The future of hunting depends on it.

2014-15 Overview:

- Logs were received from 86 hunters.
- Hunters averaged 12.5 hunting trips throughout the season.
- 20% of hunts included the use of dogs.
- Average hunt lasted 2.8 hours.
- Data was provided from 1,079 hunts.
- Data was provided from 73 counties across Kentucky.
- Central Region = 589 hunts East Region = 213 hunts West Region = 277 hunts (*see Appendix A for regional map*)
- Hunters saw an average of 5.7 squirrels per **hunt**.
- Hunters saw an average of 2.0 squirrels per **hour**.

The number of squirrels seen and killed by hunters decreased as the season progressed (Figure 1).

- Hunters saw an average of 4.8 gray squirrels per hunt and 0.9 fox squirrels per hunt.
- Hunters saw an average of 1.7 gray squirrels per hour and 0.3 fox squirrels per hour.

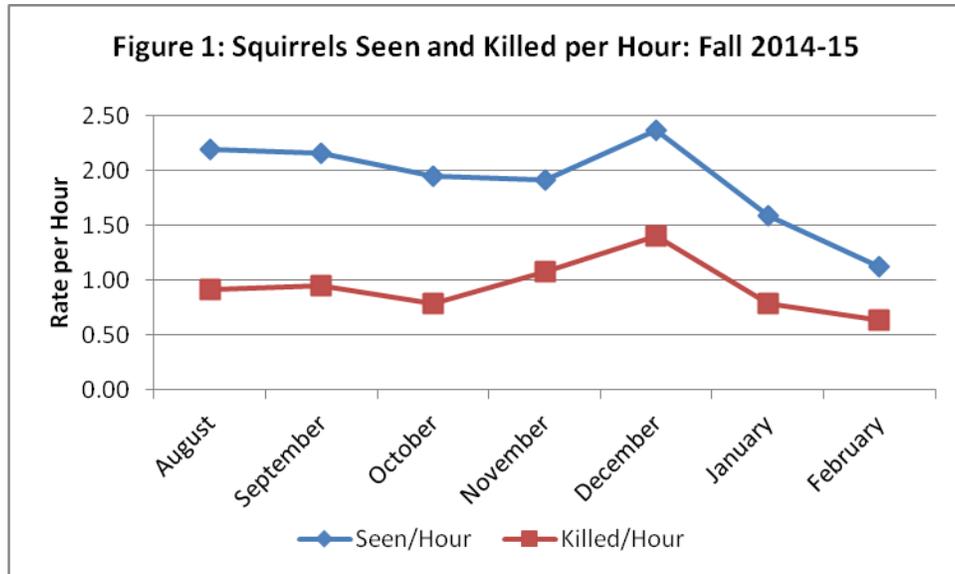


Figure 2 shows the long-term trend for the number of gray and fox squirrels seen per hour.

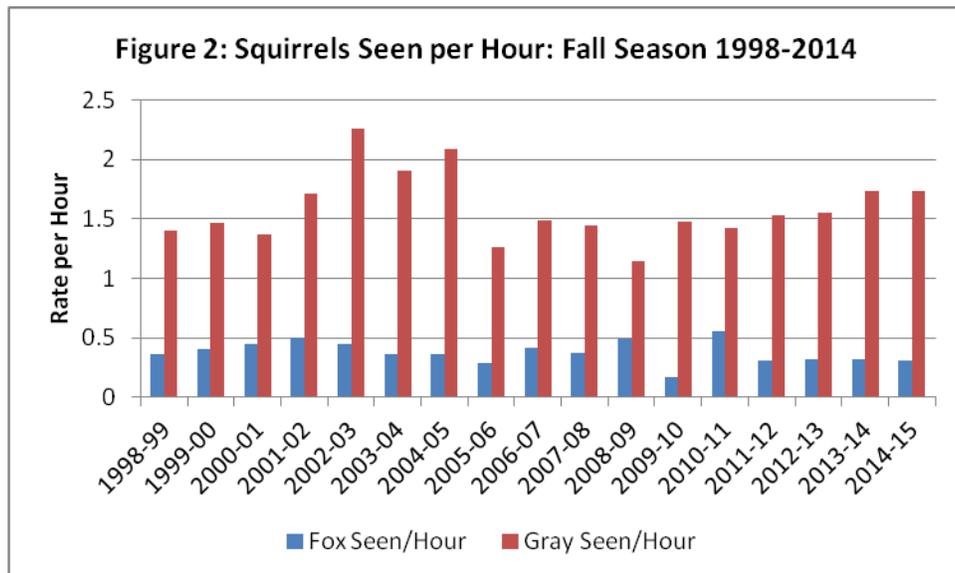


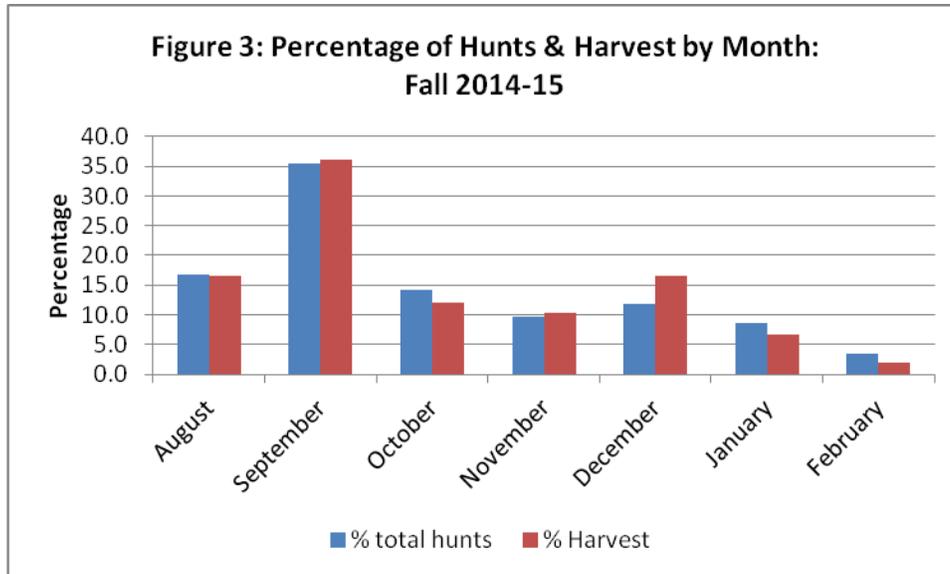
Table 2. Summary of Fall Squirrel Hunter Cooperator Survey data; 2008-2014 squirrel season.

STATISTICS	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total cooperators	117	109	97	85	83	81	86
Total hunts	1320	1319	1134	1144	1123	1077	1079
Total counties	88	91	82	76	69	72	73
Average hunts/cooperator	11.3	12.1	11.6	13.3	13.5	13.2	12.5
Total hours	3566	3499	2946	3063	3319	3097	3016
Hunts using dogs (%)	13.0	11.0	14.4	13.0	13.8	17.6	20.4
Total fox squirrels seen	1764	1254	1625	947	1053	1005	929
Total fox squirrels killed	726	653	818	487	550	533	473
Total fox squirrels wounded	52	66	52	40	39	35	31
Total gray squirrels seen	4076	5321	4184	4684	5145	5342	5213
Total gray squirrels killed	1822	2744	1895	2315	2389	2561	2451
Total gray squirrels wounded	132	206	153	177	227	185	164
Harvest of squirrels seen (%)	43.6	50.8	46.7	49.7	47.4	48.7	50.7
Squirrels wounded (%)	3.2	4.0	3.5	3.8	4.3	3.4	3.1
Hunting mortality (%)	46.7	54.8	50.2	53.6	51.7	52.2	53.8

Hunter Effort

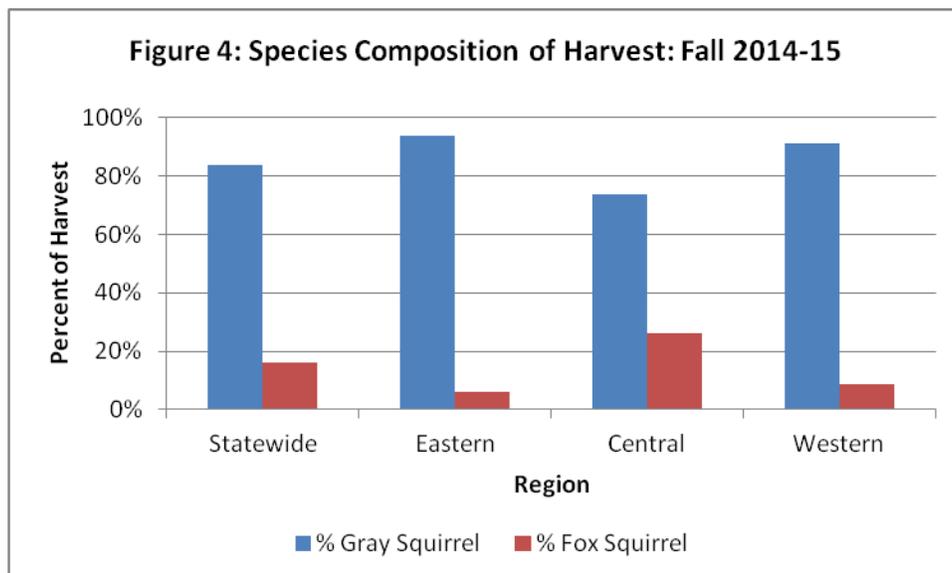
Hunting effort was greater towards the beginning of squirrel season. Fifty-two percent of the hunts took place in August and September (Figure 3).

The hunter effort index declined as the season progressed, and squirrel-hunting trips were rare in January and February. Squirrel hunting is one of a few seasons open in August and September, and later season opening dates for deer, waterfowl, rabbit, grouse, and quail may account for the greater hunting effort taking place towards the beginning of squirrel season. The percentage of hunts dropped beginning in November, with only 10% of the total hunts occurring in this month. The drop in hunting rate was likely a direct result of the onset of deer gun season. Historical Hunter Cooperator data shows a similar trend.



Harvest

- Hunters harvested 50.7% of squirrels seen and wounded 3.1%. Assuming wounded squirrels did not survive, the hunting mortality rate was 53.8% of squirrels seen in 2014-15.
- Statewide, 84% of the harvest was comprised of gray squirrels (Figure 4). The rate suggests Kentucky squirrel hunters prefer hunting in more extensive forests and woodlands, common to gray squirrels, than small woodlots and fencerow-type habitats where fox squirrels are often found. It also implies that gray squirrels are more abundant than fox squirrels.



II. 2014 Mast Survey Results

A statewide mast production survey of Kentucky's most important producers of wildlife foods was initiated in 1953 and has been conducted annually thereafter. A close relationship has been found between a given year's mast production and the following year's squirrel population level statewide. The mast survey looks at the 3 primary mast producing tree groups (hickories, red oaks, and white oaks) with American beech being the only individual species surveyed.

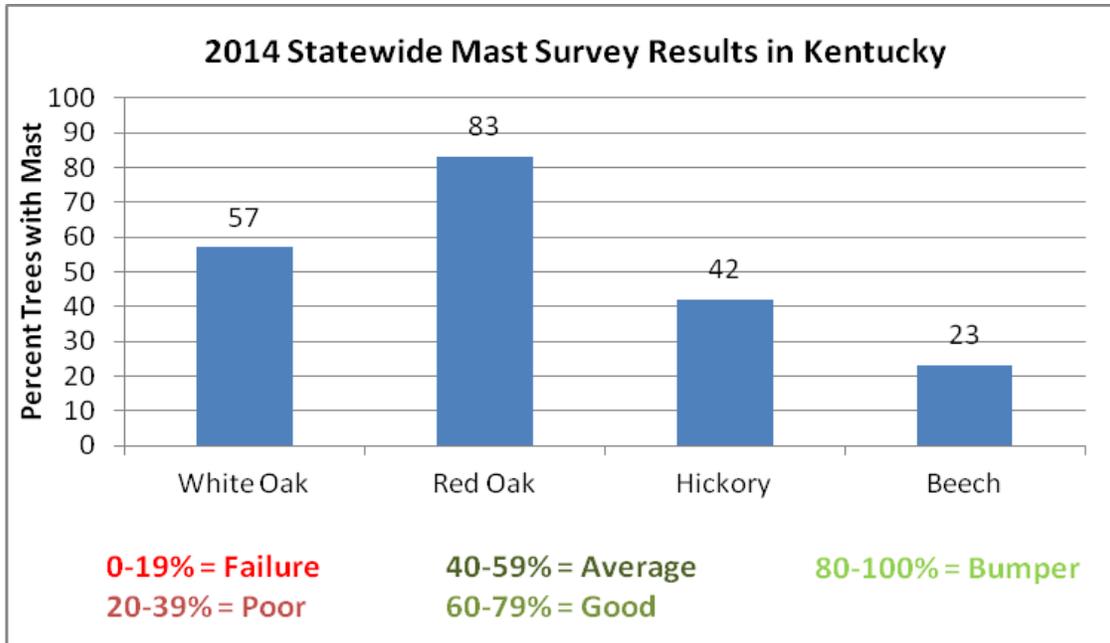
Summary of the Survey

The chart (mast results) shows the proportion of trees bearing acorns (PBA) or other mast across Kentucky. As an example, 57.0% listed in the white oak row means that for every white oak tree surveyed in Kentucky in 2014, an average of 57% of those trees contained acorns. Statewide, mast production in 2014 was above average for white oak and red oak trees.

Statewide

Mast Results:

	Failure 0-19%	Poor 20-39%	Average 40-59%	Good 60-79%	Bumper 80-100%
White Oak			57.0		
Red Oak					83.0
Hickory			42.0		
Beech		23.0			



III. 2015-16 Fall Squirrel Hunt Forecast

The 2014 mast crop was rated “above average” for white oak and “bumper” for red oak. Hickory trees produced quite a bit of mast as well. This meant that Kentucky’s forests did have quite a bit of food present. Last year, hunters saw an average of 2.0 squirrels per hour. Hunters should expect to see a similar average once again this season, as mast production was very good. However, the state did experience a severe winter. It’s not yet clear what impact the harsh weather may have had on small game populations

Don't forget to turn in your Hunter Cooperator log at the completion of this year’s hunt. **Logs should be returned no later than May 31, 2016.** In return we'll send you a report and a small gift as a token of our appreciation. Encourage all of your friends to log their hunts as well. Have a safe and enjoyable squirrel season and thanks again for your support! And don't forget to take someone new to hunting out with you this year.

